

PODCASTS

Leadership Evolution: Insights from Sensei Labs on Growing Teams and Company Culture

In this episode of the Human Side of Business Podcast, Jay Goldman, co-founder and CEO of Sensei Labs, shares his journey of leadership and scaling companies.

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Topics Covered:

- Navigating Leadership Changes from Startups to Large Enterprises
- Cultivating Team Engagement and Emotional Intelligence in the Workplace
- Building a Growth-Centric Organizational Culture
- Adapting Leadership Styles for Scaling Businesses

Introduction

In this episode of the Human Side of Business Podcast, Jay Goldman, co-founder and CEO of Sensei Labs, shares his journey of leadership and scaling companies. From the roots of building Sensei Labs as a spin-out from Click Health, Jay offers a deep dive into the complexities of transitioning leadership styles, fostering team engagement, and creating a culture that thrives on growth and opportunity.

Navigating Leadership Changes from Startups to Large Enterprises

Jay's journey from Click Health to Sensei Labs is a prime example of leadership evolution. He discusses how leadership styles need to adapt when transitioning from a large company to a startup environment. At Click Health, a larger and more established organization, the focus was on maintaining consistent growth, while at Sensei Labs, a smaller, more dynamic startup, the emphasis shifted to rapid learning and problem-solving in new and ambiguous situations. This contrast highlights the importance of aligning leadership approaches with the stage and needs of the company.

Cultivating Team Engagement and Emotional Intelligence in the Workplace

A major theme of the conversation is the role of emotional intelligence and personal growth in team engagement. Jay emphasizes the concept of “weekly compounded learning rates,” where each week's learning builds on the last, promoting a continuous growth mindset. This philosophy not only drives personal and professional development but also keeps employees motivated and aligned with the company's mission.

Jay also introduces the “mood grid,” a tool used in meetings at Sensei Labs to gauge team sentiment and ensure everyone feels seen and heard. This approach, combined with regular coaching sessions instead of annual reviews, ensures that feedback is timely and actionable, allowing employees to make small adjustments frequently rather than large, delayed course corrections.

Building a Growth-Centric Organizational Culture

Sensei Labs places a strong emphasis on creating a growth-centric culture that values experimentation and innovation. Jay discusses how the company's core values—selflessness, empathy, nimbleness, skillfulness, entrepreneurial spirit, and integrity—are embedded into every aspect of the organization, from hiring practices to performance evaluations. This intentional cultural design fosters an environment where employees feel empowered to take risks and learn from failures, which is crucial in a startup setting.

Jay also highlights how Sensei Labs structured its physical office space to prioritize collaboration, showing how thoughtful design can enhance team interaction and maintain a strong company culture, even in a hybrid working model.

Adapting Leadership Styles for Scaling Businesses

As companies grow, leadership needs to evolve from managing direct reports to guiding other leaders. Jay shares insights into the two critical career inflection points where leadership training is most impactful: when an individual contributor becomes a leader, and when a leader becomes a leader of leaders. These transitions are crucial, as they shift the focus from individual contributions to broader team and strategic management.

Jay notes that bringing in new leaders from outside the organization often requires a "deprogramming" period, where these individuals learn to align with Sensei Labs' unique, experimentation-friendly culture. This onboarding approach helps new leaders embrace the company's values and drive the organization forward.

Conclusion

Jay's insights offer a roadmap for leaders navigating the challenges of scaling teams and maintaining a strong company culture. By prioritizing growth, embracing experimentation, and continuously adapting leadership styles, businesses can foster an environment where both the company and its people thrive. Sensei Labs' journey underscores the power of aligning leadership with organizational values to build resilient, engaged, and high-performing teams.

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